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Soh

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(54) **REGION-OF-INTEREST BASED PRINT QUALITY OPTIMIZATION**

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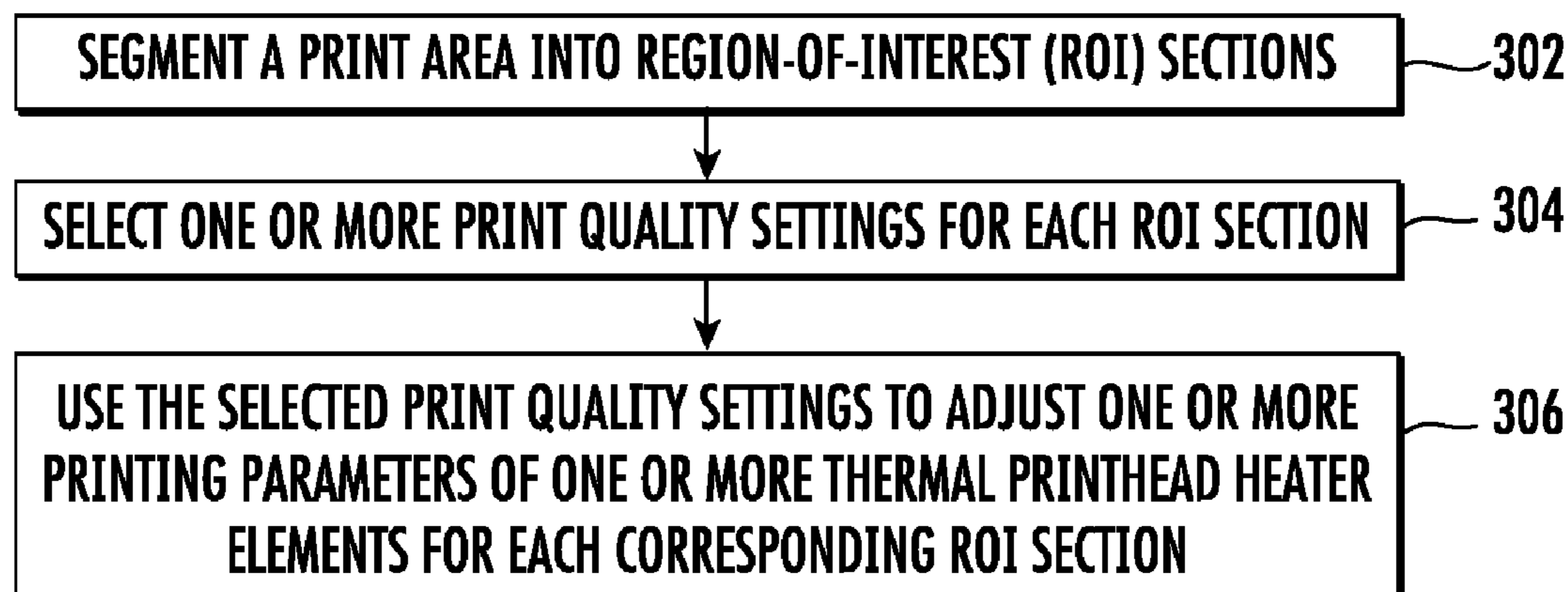
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method for printing includes analyzing print quality requirements for a printing area; adjusting settings for heater elements (e.g., energy and/or firing durations) of strobe lines based on the requirements analysis; and providing a plurality of individual strobe signals to the strobe lines. The strobe signals can be transmitted simultaneously, for example with a field-programmable gate array. Analyzing print quality requirements can include separating the printing area into one or more areas of interest, such as rows and/or columns. For each area of interest individual print quality settings (e.g., darkness, contrast, and/or media sensitivity) may be selected.

20 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets

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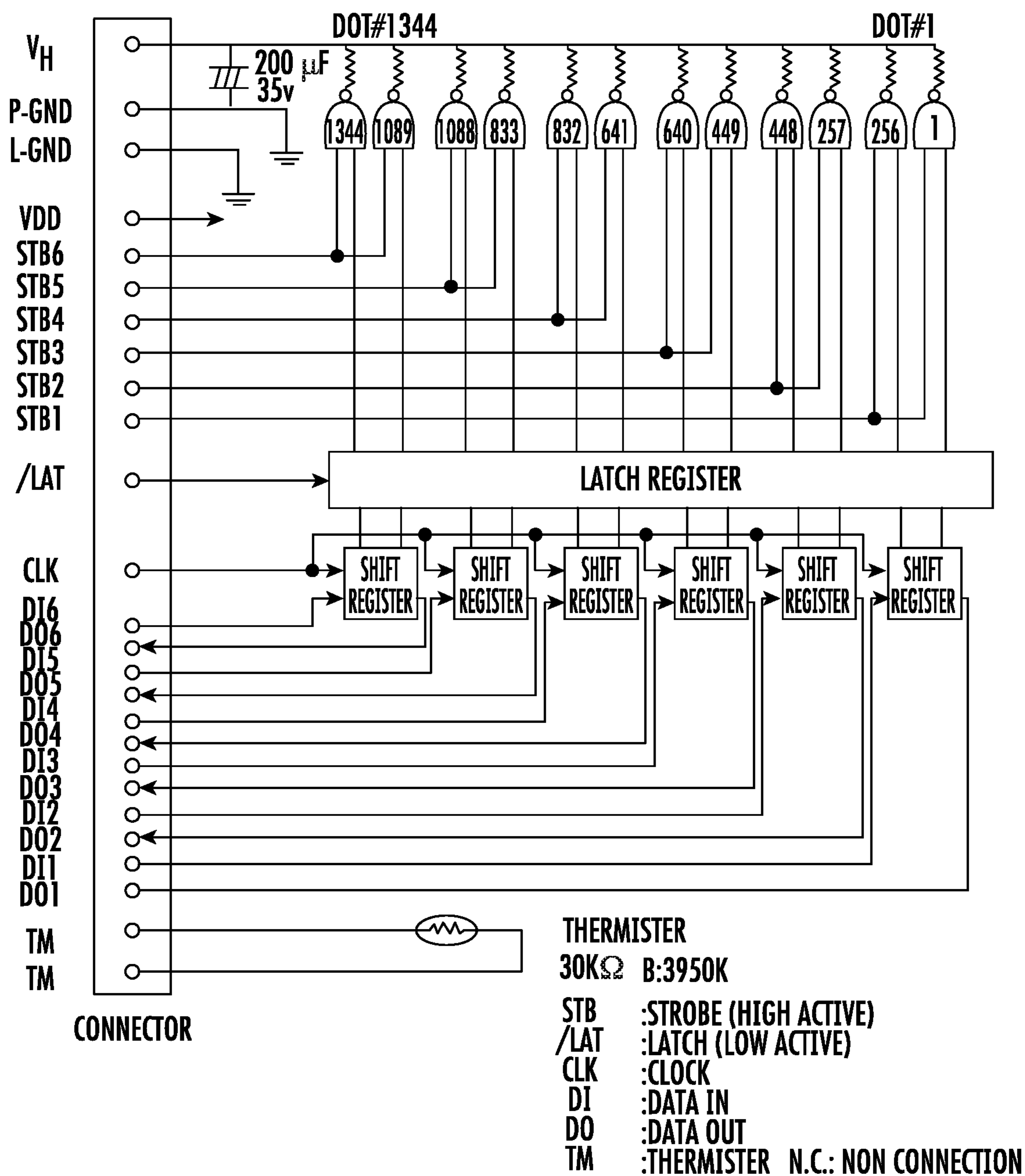
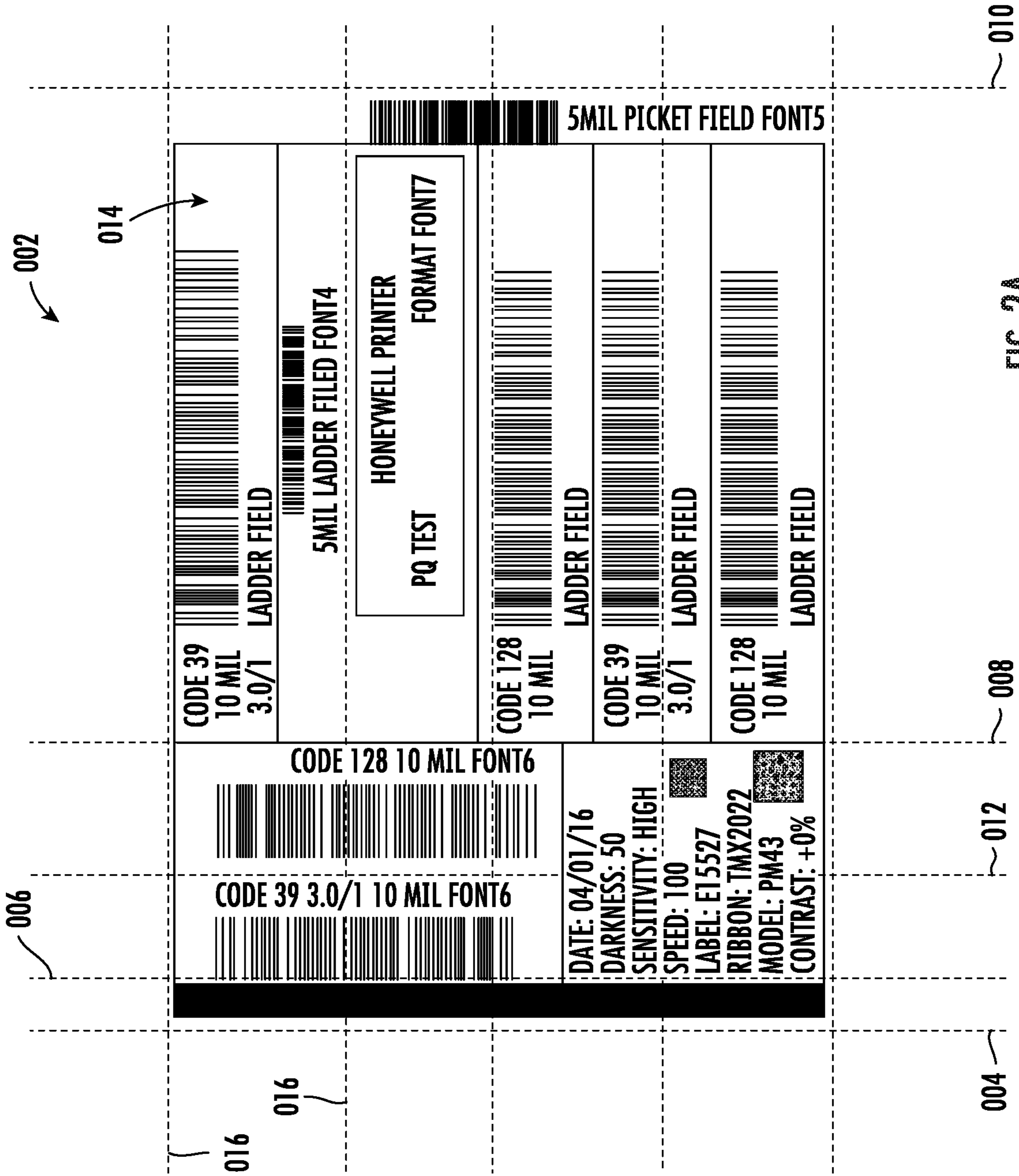


FIG. 1



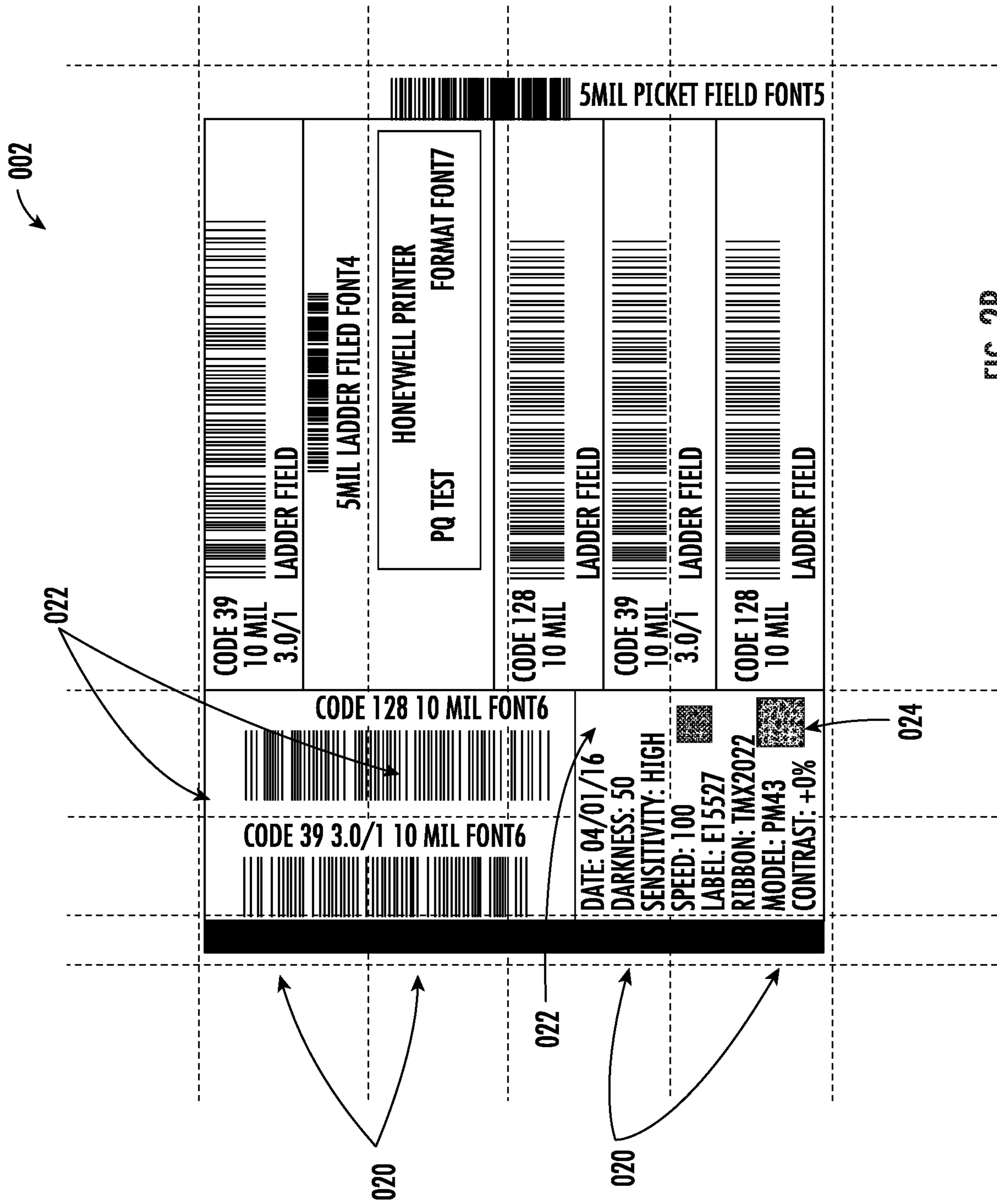


FIG. 2B

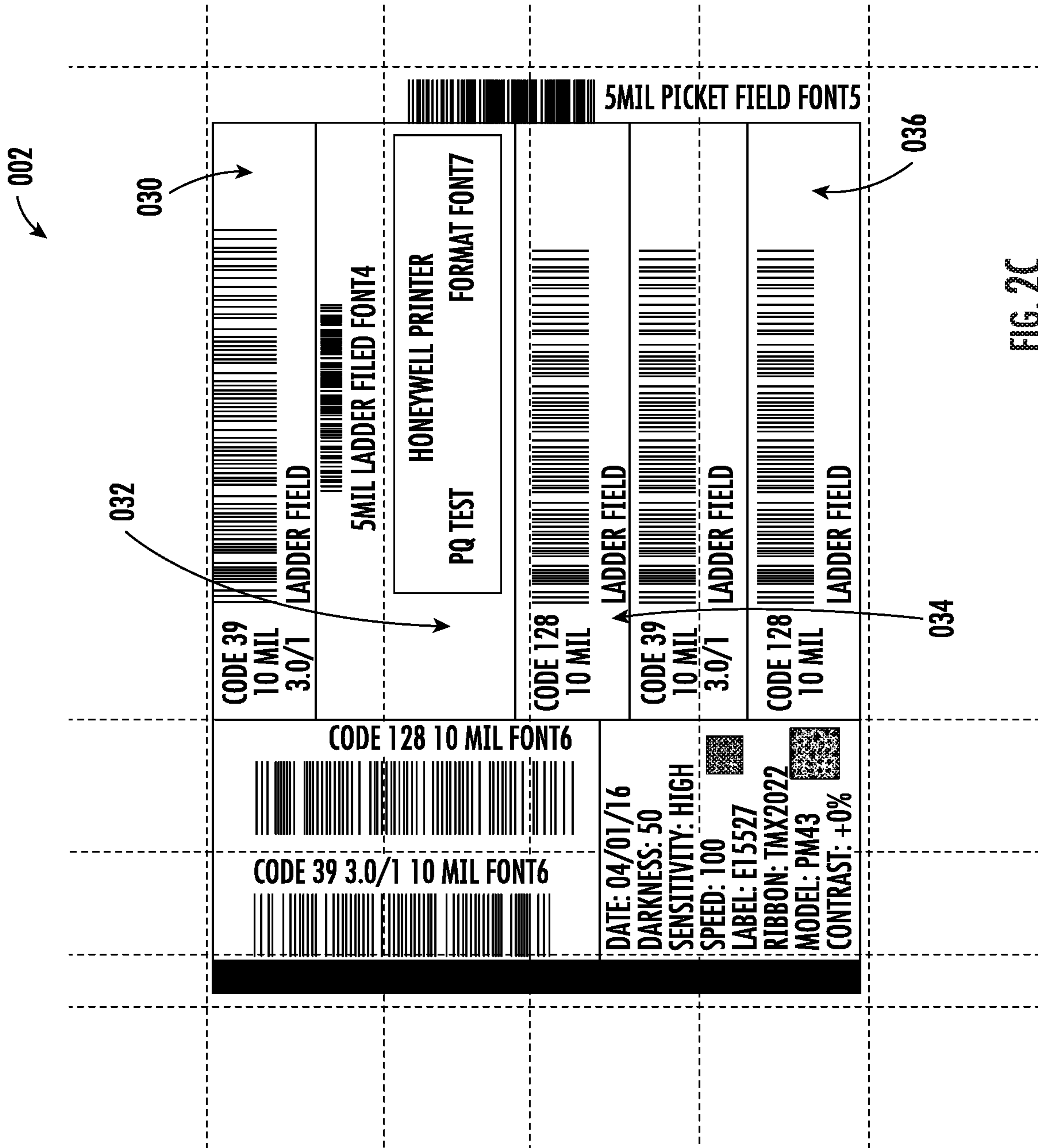


FIG. 2C

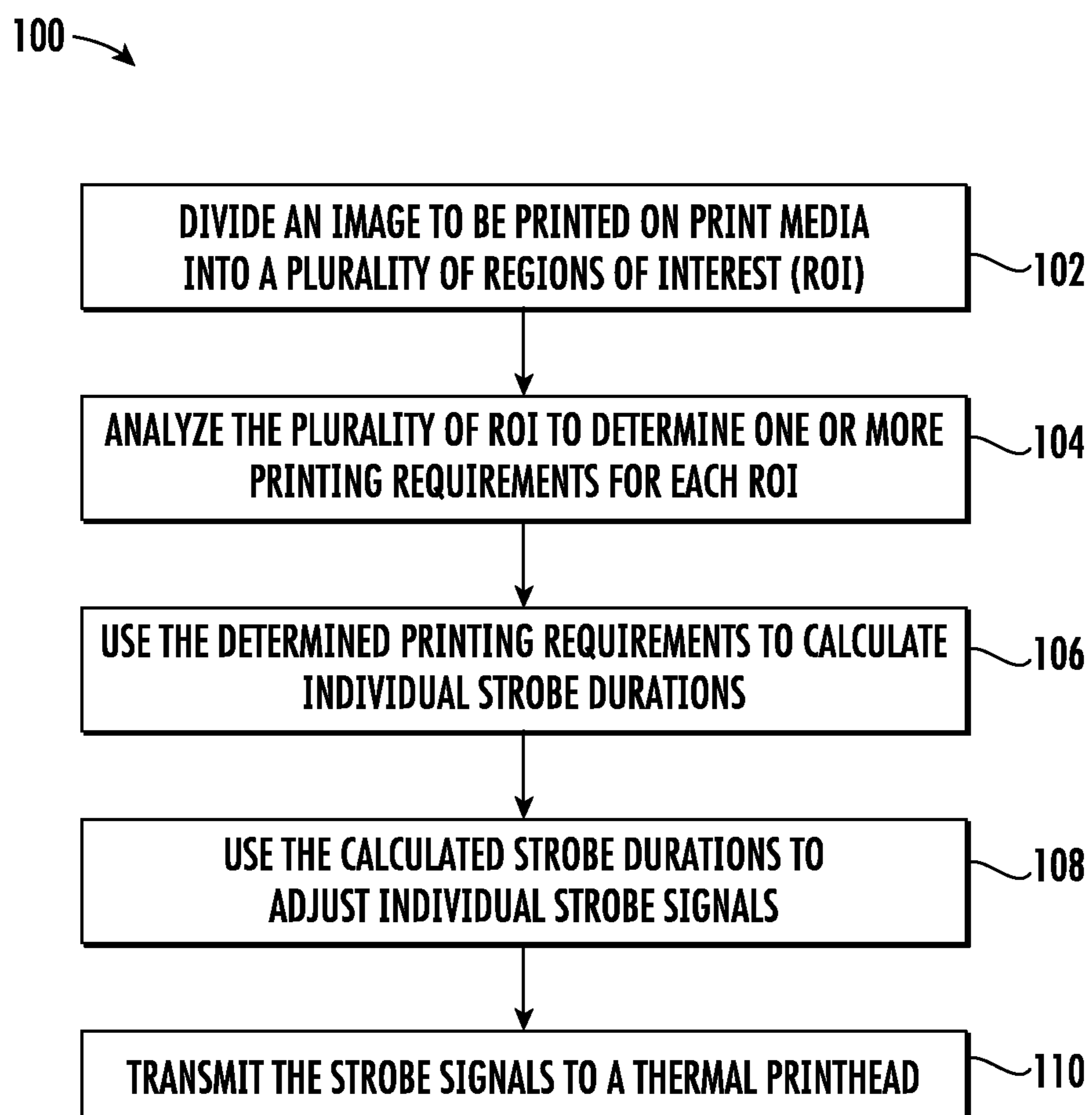


FIG. 3

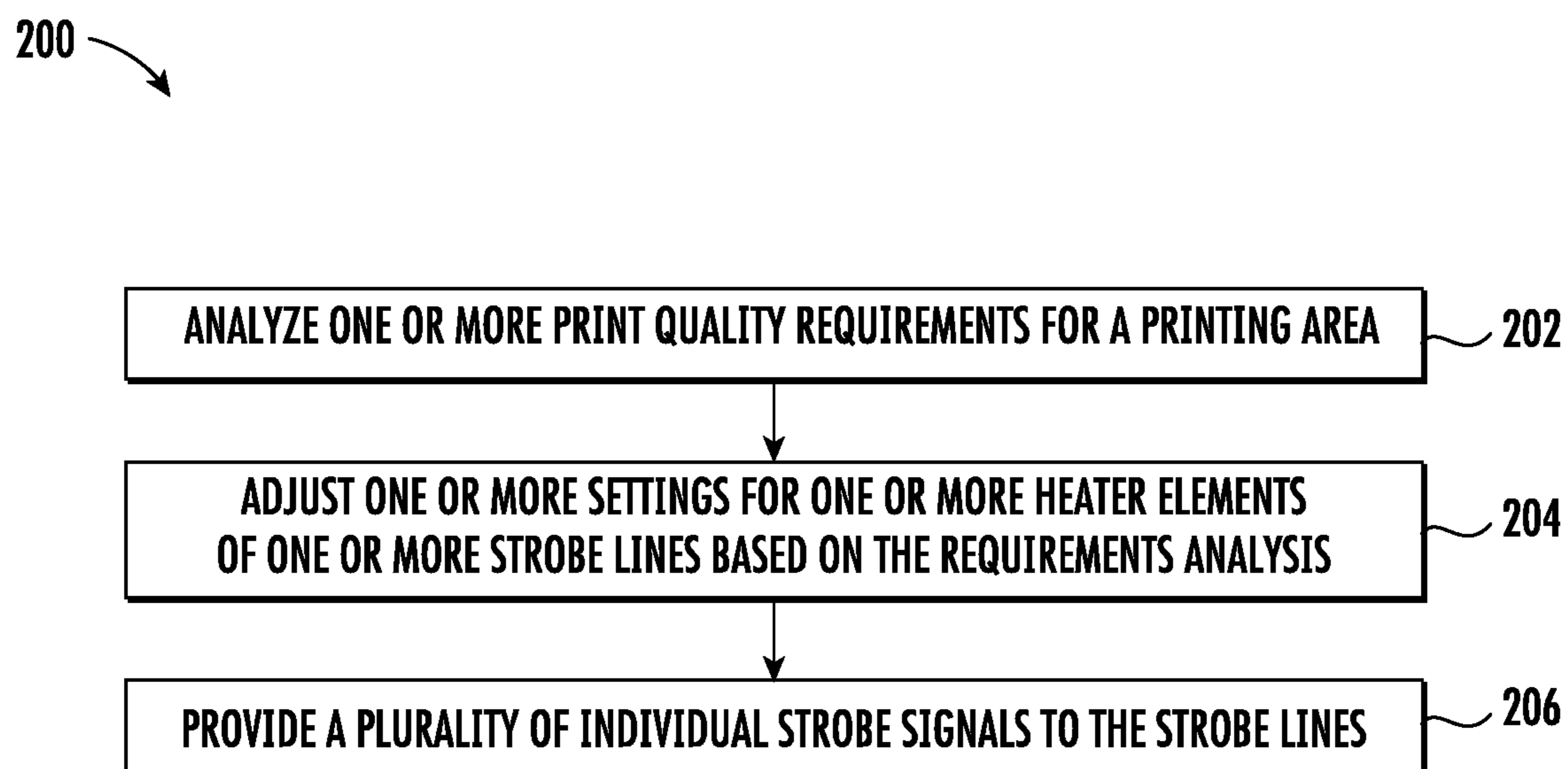


FIG. 4

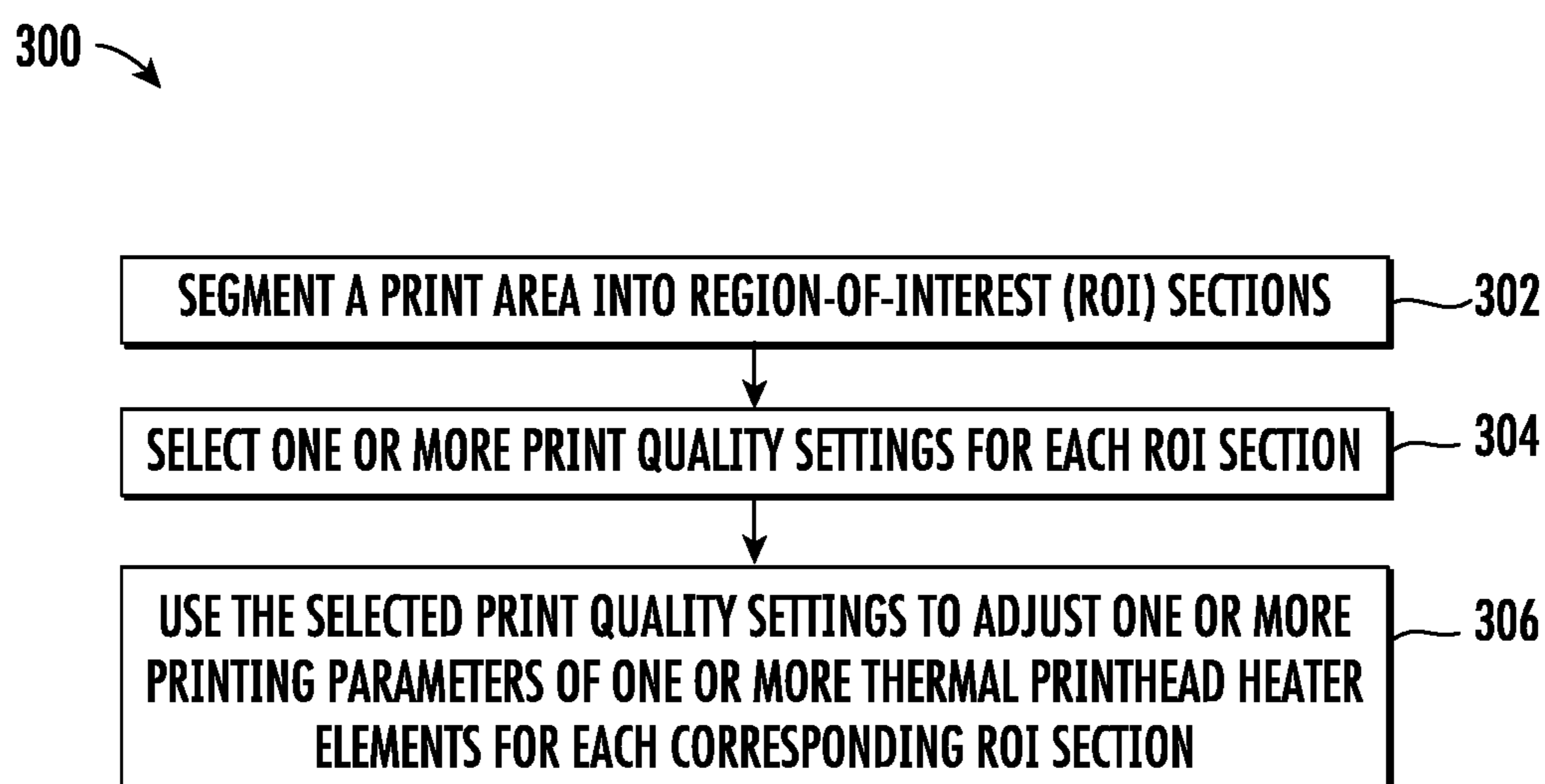


FIG. 5

REGION-OF-INTEREST BASED PRINT QUALITY OPTIMIZATION

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/112,108, filed Aug. 24, 2018, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/449,445, filed Mar. 3, 2017, now U.S. Pat. No. 10,105,963, issued Oct. 23, 2018, each of which are hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to print quality optimization, and more particularly to methods for print quality adjustment for individual regions of interest.

BACKGROUND

Generally speaking, multiple elements can be printed on the same label. For example, barcode symbologies (e.g., QR code, code 128, or code 39) can be combined with fonts or designs (e.g., black bar, or logo). Most printers allow selecting only unified print quality settings, which pertain to the collection of the elements to be printed in general, and do not take into account print quality requirements preferred for those elements individually. Consequently, the selected settings may not be optimal for every barcode symbology, font, and design on the label. This often leads to print quality variation between the elements displayed on the same label. Moreover, variation in thermal printhead pressure and heater element resistance may further lead to print quality variation throughout different areas of the same printed label.

Several attempts have been made to address this issue. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 8,774,654 by Kielland discloses a thermal printhead with four sets of heating elements arranged in rows, and controlled individually by driving circuits, while strobe signals are provided to each set in a particular pattern. However, the reference does not disclose print quality variation on desired regions within the same label. U.S. Pat. No. 5,809,214 by Nureki et al. discloses a thermal printer having a printhead divided into rows of heating blocks, which are driven by individual driver units. However, the reference does not disclose controlling heating arrays individually to optimize print quality of particular regions of a label. U.S. Pat. No. 5,085,529 by McGourty et al. discloses a method of printing on a print sheet having a score line across it. However, the reference does not disclose variation in print quality between different print areas. Additionally, the reference does not disclose a thermal printhead having multiple heating elements. U.S. Pat. No. 7,941,750 by Laughlin discloses an inkjet printer capable of adjusting print quality for different regions. However, the reference is not related to a thermal printer, and does not disclose individual control of multiple heating elements on a printhead for controlling print quality at a desired region of a print media. Consequently, none of the references mention printing different information of different print quality on desired regions of interest at a print media with a thermal printer.

Therefore, a need exists for a method of adjusting print quality settings, which can account for individual requirements of each element to be presented on print media.

SUMMARY

Accordingly, in one aspect, the present invention embraces print quality optimization based on dividing an

image to be printed on print media into regions of interest, and adjusting print quality settings for each region.

In an exemplary embodiment, a method for print settings control includes dividing an image to be printed on print media into regions of interest (ROI); analyzing the ROI to determine printing requirements for each ROI; calculating individual strobe durations and adjusting individual strobe signals; and transmitting the strobe signals to a thermal printhead.

In another exemplary embodiment, a method for printing includes analyzing print quality requirements for a printing area; adjusting settings for heater elements of strobe lines; and providing individual strobe signals to the strobe lines.

In yet another exemplary embodiment, a method for print quality adjustment includes segmenting a print area into region-of-interest sections; selecting print quality settings for each region-of-interest section; and adjusting printing parameters of thermal printhead heater elements for each corresponding region-of-interest section.

The foregoing illustrative summary, as well as other exemplary objectives and/or advantages of the invention, and the manner in which the same are accomplished, are further explained within the following detailed description and its accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 schematically depicts an exemplary embodiment of a thermal printhead circuit diagram.

FIG. 2A graphically depicts an image to be printed on print media divided into regions of interest, according to an embodiment.

FIG. 2B graphically depicts an image to be printed on print media divided into regions of interest, according to another embodiment.

FIG. 2C graphically depicts an image to be printed on print media divided into regions of interest, according to yet another embodiment.

FIG. 3 schematically depicts a method for print settings control, according to an embodiment.

FIG. 4 schematically depicts a method for printing, according to an embodiment.

FIG. 5 schematically depicts a method for print quality adjustment, according to an embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention embraces methods for print quality adjustment for individual regions of interest.

Print quality settings of a printer are usually determined by balancing requirements for different barcode symbologies and designs to be printed on the same print media (e.g., a label), which can result in a print quality variation. To overcome this issue, a print area can be segmented into rows and/or columns of regions of interest, followed by applying separate print settings optimal for each element in each region of interest. Different print quality settings applied to individual regions can also be used to compensate for darkness variation in different areas of the print media. For example, the darkness variation can occur between a left and right sides of the printed label due to resistance and pressure variation.

FIG. 1 schematically depicts an exemplary embodiment of a thermal printhead circuit diagram. Firings of thermal printhead heater elements can be controlled by strobe lines (labeled STB1-STB6 in the diagram). Each strobe line can control firing durations of a group of heater elements (e.g.,

STB1 can control dots 1-256, etc.). By using different strobe signals for each of the strobe lines, energy of each heater element group can be adjusted by changing a corresponding strobe duration.

FIG. 2A graphically depicts an image **002** to be printed on print media divided into regions of interest, according to an embodiment. As shown in FIG. 2A, the first column of a region of interest (ROI) is marked with a first print line **004** and a next user defined print line **006**. The last column of the ROI is marked with a last user defined print line **008** and a last print line of the print job **010**. User can define any print line (for example, line **012**) as a vertical segmentation line of the ROIs. Each individual ROI can be identified by its row and/or column number. For example, ROI(1,4) **014** shown in FIG. 2A, refers to a ROI defined by the first row and the fourth column. Distance between rows **016** can be fixed, and determined by a heater element group. Printing direction can be chosen to be from the right-hand side of the figure to the left-hand side of the figure.

FIGS. 2B and 2C graphically depict an image **002** to be printed on print media divided into regions of interest, according to alternative embodiments. FIG. 2B shows how different groups of ROIs can be grouped together, and have print quality settings assigned to the groups to optimize print quality for different symbologies and designs. Specifically, Group A, marked with reference number **020**, includes ROI(1,1), ROI(2,1), ROI(3,1), and ROI(4,1); Group B includes ROI(1,2), ROI(2,2), and ROI(3, 2); Group C, marked with reference number **022**, includes ROI(1,3), ROI(2,3), and ROI(3,3); and Group D, marked with reference number **024**, includes ROI(4,3).

FIG. 2C shows how different groups of ROIs can be grouped together, and have print quality settings assigned to the groups to compensate for print quality variation from a left to a right side of the label. Specifically, Group A, marked with reference number **030**, includes ROI(1,1); Group B, marked with reference number **032**, includes ROI(2,1); Group C, marked with reference number **034**, includes ROI(3,1); and Group D, marked with reference number **036**, includes ROI(4,1).

FIG. 3 shows a method **100** for print settings control, according to an embodiment. At **102**, an image to be printed on print media is divided into a plurality of regions of interest. At **104**, the plurality of regions of interest is analyzed to determine one or more printing requirements for each region of interest. At **106**, the determined printing requirements are used to calculate individual strobe durations. At **108**, the calculated strobe durations are used to adjust individual strobe signals. At **110**, the strobe signals are transmitted to a thermal printhead.

In an embodiment, transmitting the strobe signals, **110**, can include transmitting all the strobe signals simultaneously. Additionally, transmitting the strobe signals simultaneously can include transmitting the signals with a field-programmable gate array (FPGA). Adjusting individual strobe signals, **108**, can include adjusting energy of one or more heater elements of the thermal printhead.

FIG. 4 shows a method **200** for printing, according to an embodiment. At **202**, one or more print quality requirements are analyzed for a printing area. At **204**, one or more settings for one or more heater elements of one or more strobe lines are adjusted based on the requirements analysis. At **206**, a plurality of individual strobe signals is provided to the strobe lines.

In an embodiment, adjusting settings for heater elements, **204**, can include adjusting energy and/or firing durations. Providing a plurality of individual strobe signals, **206**, can

include providing a plurality of individual strobe signals with an FPGA-based driver circuit. Analyzing print quality requirements for a printing area, **202**, can include separating the printing area into one or more areas of interest. Additionally, separating a printing area into areas of interest can include separating the printing area into rows and/or columns. The method **200** can further include determining individual print quality requirements for the one or more areas of interest. For example, print quality requirements can include temperature of a thermal printhead, tension on a platen roller, and/or printing speed. Additionally, analyzing print quality requirements, **202**, can include analyzing a print job request.

FIG. 5 shows a method **300** for print quality adjustment, according to an embodiment. At **302**, a print area is segmented into region-of-interest sections. At **304**, one or more print quality settings are selected for each region-of-interest section. At **306**, the selected print quality settings are used to adjust one or more printing parameters of one or more thermal printhead heater elements for each corresponding region-of-interest section.

In an embodiment, segmenting a print area into region-of-interest sections, **302**, can include segmenting the print area in rows. Additionally, the method **300** can include segmenting the print area in columns. Adjusting printing parameters, **306**, can include adjusting strobe durations for one or more heater groups. Selecting print quality settings, **304**, can include selecting darkness, contrast, and/or media sensitivity. Segmenting a print area, **302**, can include segmenting a print area having one or more barcodes and/or one or more designs.

Device and method components are meant to show only those specific details that are pertinent to understanding the embodiments of the present disclosure so as not to obscure the disclosure with details that will be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art having the benefit of the description herein. In various embodiments, the sequence in which the elements of appear in exemplary embodiments disclosed herein may vary. Two or more method steps may be performed simultaneously or in a different order than the sequence in which the elements appear in the exemplary embodiments.

To supplement the present disclosure, this application incorporates entirely by reference the following commonly assigned patents, patent application publications, and patent applications:

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In the specification and/or figures, typical embodiments of the invention have been disclosed. The present invention is not limited to such exemplary embodiments. The use of the term “and/or” includes any and all combinations of one or more of the associated listed items. The figures are schematic representations and so are not necessarily drawn to scale. Unless otherwise noted, specific terms have been used in a generic and descriptive sense and not for purposes of limitation.

The invention claimed is:

1. A method for print settings control, the method comprising:

analyzing a content region in a print job request to determine one or more printing requirements for the content region;

based upon the one or more printing requirements for the content region, selecting one or more print quality settings for the content region; and

using the selected print quality settings to set one or more printing parameters for one or more thermal printhead heater elements that correspond to the content region.

2. The method according to claim **1**, wherein using the selected print quality settings to set the one or more printing parameters for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements further comprises based upon the set one or more printing parameters, calculating at least one individual strobe duration.

3. The method according to claim **2**, further comprising: setting at least one strobe signal based on the calculated at least one individual strobe duration; and

transmitting the at least one strobe signal to a thermal printhead to set the one or more thermal printhead heater elements.

4. The method according to claim **2**, wherein the calculated at least one individual strobe duration corresponds to an energy level of the one or more thermal printhead heater elements.

5. The method according to claim **1**, wherein the print job request comprises the content region and another content region.

6. The method according to claim **5**, further comprising analyzing the another content region to determine one or more printing requirements for the another content region; and

based upon the one or more printing requirements for the another content region, selecting one or more print quality settings for the another content region; and using the selected print quality settings to set one or more printing parameters of one or more thermal printhead heater elements that correspond to the another content region.

7. The method according to claim **1**, wherein the selected print quality settings are configured to compensate print quality variation from a left to a right side of a print area.

8. The method according to claim **1**, wherein the one or more printing requirements for the content region comprise one or more of an energy level, a battery level, a temperature of a thermal printhead, a tension on a platen roller, a selected print quality setting, or a printing speed.

9. The method according to claim **1**, wherein using the selected print quality settings to set the one or more printing parameters for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements that correspond to the content region further comprises setting an energy level for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements.

10. The method according to claim **1**, wherein using the selected print quality settings to set the one or more printing parameters for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements that correspond to the content region further comprises setting a firing duration for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements.

11. An apparatus for print settings control, the apparatus comprising:

a processor and a non-transitory memory including program code, the non-transitory memory and the program code configured to, with the processor, cause the apparatus to at least:

analyze a content region in a print job request to determine one or more printing requirements for the content region;

based upon the one or more printing requirements for the content region, select one or more print quality settings for the content region; and

use the selected print quality settings to set one or more printing parameters for one or more thermal printhead heater elements that correspond to the content region.

12. The apparatus according to claim **11**, wherein the at least one non-transitory memory and the program code that is configured to, with the processor, cause the apparatus to at least use the selected print quality settings to set the one or more printing parameters for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements is further configured to, based upon the set one or more printing parameters, calculate at least one individual strobe duration.

13. The apparatus according to claim **12**, wherein the at least one non-transitory memory and the program code is further configured to, with the processor, cause the apparatus to at least:

set at least one strobe signal based on the calculated at least one individual strobe duration; and

transmit the at least one strobe signal to a thermal printhead to set the one or more thermal printhead heater elements.

14. The apparatus according to claim **12**, wherein the calculated at least one individual strobe duration corresponds to an energy level of the one or more thermal printhead heater elements.

15. The apparatus according to claim **11**, wherein the print job request comprises the content region and another content region.

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16. The apparatus according to claim **15**, wherein the at least one non-transitory memory and the program code is further configured to, with the processor, cause the apparatus to at least

analyze the another content region to determine one or more printing requirements for the another content region; and

based upon the one or more printing requirements for the another content region, select one or more print quality settings for the another content region; and

use the selected print quality settings to set one or more printing parameters of one or more thermal printhead heater elements that correspond to the another content region.

17. The apparatus according to claim **11**, wherein the selected print quality settings are configured to compensate print quality variation from a left to a right side of a print area.

18. The apparatus according to claim **11**, wherein the one or more printing requirements for the content region com-

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prise one or more of an energy level, a battery level, a temperature of a thermal printhead, a tension on a platen roller, a selected print quality setting, or a printing speed.

19. The apparatus according to claim **11**, wherein the at least one non-transitory memory and the program code that is configured to, with the processor, cause the apparatus to at least use the selected print quality settings to set the one or more printing parameters for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements that correspond to the content region is further configured to set an energy level for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements.

20. The apparatus according to claim **11**, wherein the at least one non-transitory memory and the program code that is configured to, with the processor, cause the apparatus to at least use the selected print quality settings to set the one or more printing parameters for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements that correspond to the content region is further configured to set a firing duration for the one or more thermal printhead heater elements.

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